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C O N F I D E N T I A L ZAGREB 001365

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SUBJECT: MESIC SPEECH AT EMBASSY OPENING FAILS TO BOOST
BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: ZAGREB 1296

Classified By: Poloff A.F.Godfrey for reasons 1.5 (B,D)

11. (C) On June 13, President Mesic attended the ceremonial opening of the new U.S. Embassy in Zagreb. The Ambassador used the festive occasion to declare that the imposing, state-of-the art chancery is a concrete example of the United States' long-term commitment to Croatia. Rather than use his remarks on this occasion to step away from GoC actions which have harmed the bilateral relationship (ref), the approach and tone of Mesic's speech was disappointing and open to interpretation. While he did note some positive elements of the U.S. - Croatia relationship, he also raised contentious subjects like the U.S. use of sanctions to punish other states, the possibility that the U.S. would seek to marginalize the UN or seek to slow the progress of EU unification. While Mesic rejected the idea that "the U.S. would even think about" these actions, he seemed to be conveying his doubts about U.S. policies. Mesic went on to re-assert Croatia's sovereignty and declared that the U.S. should accept "a Croatia which uses its own head much more than a Croatia reduced to a subservient role."

12. (C) Our GoC interlocutors were quick to point out that Mesic does not represent the formal position of PM Racan's government. Indeed, since Mesic was elected, he has been a willing partner with the Government in limiting the role of Croatia's presidency in an effort to prevent recurrence of the excesses of the Tudjman regime. Croatia's President now plays more of a ceremonial role, and his statements are at times less nuanced than the GoC positions; that was certainly the case last month when he called U.S. action in Iraq "illegitimate."

13. (C) After the Embassy ceremony, we called President Mesic's Foreign Policy Adviser Tomislav Jakic (the likely author of the speech) to express our dissatisfaction with the message delivered. We told him -- and other GoC interlocutors -- that we thought the occasion and location was inappropriate for such an ambiguous and condescending message. We also told him the message itself was wrong and unhelpful. Jakic was defensive, saying the speech was intended to reject unequivocally the criticisms of U.S. policy, but said he would inform the president.

14. (U) Begin text of Mesic address:

Ambassador Rossin,
Distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to attend the ceremonial opening of the new Embassy of the United States of America in the Republic of Croatia. I wanted to be here today in order to affirm in this way as well Croatia's friendly feelings towards the United States. And I also wanted to see at close range and visit this impressive structure. This is the best response to all those who speculate about the United States losing interest in this part of the world and in Croatia.

Our two countries have long-standing relations. They can be traced to the fairly distant past, to the time when many Croats and people from Croatia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, left in order to seek a place in the sun on the other side of the ocean, in the New World. There is no need to recall the names of famous individuals who have come from our lands and made a significant contribution to the development and progress of the United States.

Similarly, there is no need to recall what the United States had done on the global scale, but also within the scope of our bilateral relations, in promoting democracy, freedom and human rights. Let me repeat: there is no need to recall all that, because we know it. I would simply like to say the following: Croato-American relations have always been, and will be, relations of taking and giving on both sides.

Of course, our relations have passed through different phases, they have seen their ups and downs. But at any moment we in Croatia have seen and experienced ourselves as sincere friends of the United States.

There have been and there are no anti-American feelings in Croatia. We have always been and we are friends of the

United States. However, just as in any relations, it takes two to sustain relations of friendship. In other words, the United States also ought to understand that our friendship is sincere and durable even when our thinking about a particular issue may differ from the thinking in Washington, D.C.

We know that the United States has been the firm mainstay of the free world. Therefore, we know that this excludes the possibility that the United States might even think of punishing any of its friends, with whom it shares the same values and ideals, for remaining true to the fundamental tenets of international relations - the freedom of individuals and nations and their full equality.

We know that the United States played an irreplaceable role in the foundation of the United Nations, and that it should be given the credit, perhaps more than anybody else, for the sustenance of the world organization in times and conditions which were anything but propitious. Therefore, we reject any thought that the United States could even think of marginalizing the global organization or even refrain from supporting it and thereby endanger its very survival.

We know that the project of united Europe, in the difficult and extremely dangerous times of the cold war and of the East-West confrontation, could not even have started without the sincere and full support of the great ally on the other side of the Atlantic. Therefore, we believe that any speculations according to which the United States does not regard European unification with the same enthusiasm with which it supported that millennial project for decades to be absurd and utterly unfounded.

Today Croatia sees and realizes its place in the world within the circle of democratic countries, in the ranks of the global antiterrorist coalition, in the United Nations, and tomorrow - both in the European Union and the NATO. We have never pursued our foreign policy by relying now on this country, or group of countries, and now on another.

In line with the same principles, we want to have equally good relations with all countries, large and small, powerful and less powerful ones alike.

We are aware of our European identity but also our global orientation.

We are aware, of course, of the specific role and place of the United States in the world in which we live. It is therefore completely clear that one of our foreign policy priorities is the continuation and broadening of good relations and even of alliance with the United States.

But we are an independent, sovereign state, and until we transfer, by our own free will, part of our sovereignty to the European Union, we shall make our own decisions, bearing in mind first and foremost the interest and welfare of our citizens - over the short and long term alike.

We shall always be ready to listen to others, but we also expect others to be sensitive to us. Knowing the history of the United States, we are certain that it will best understand such a position and know to appreciate a Croatia which uses its own head much more than a Croatia reduced to a subservient role.

Let me take this opportunity to convey cordial and friendly greetings to President George Bush and to the American people. Let me also wish the diplomatic representative of the United States, who will now work in this modern and impressive building at the outskirts of our capital, a pleasant performance of their duties in this traditionally friendly environment, geared to the continuous progress and development of ever better, mutually beneficial relations between our two countries.

End Text.

ROSSIN

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